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Phthisis Pulmonalis

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Of *Phthisis Pulmonalis*

It is generally conceded that of all the diseases incident to our species, there is not one; which is enveloped in greater obscurity, or which is more difficult of cure, than Pulmonary Consumption. This is to be ascribed partly to the imperfect state of the science of medicine, and partly to the innate difficulties of the disease itself. The term *Phthisis* is derived from the Greek verb *phōiw*, which signifies to waste or consume, and when applied to the pulmonary affections, denotes an ulcerated condition of the lungs. - almost every writer on the subject has considered ulceration as an uniform occurrence, and as an essential ingredient in the definition of the disease. By Gallon, the

disease is defined to be an expectoration of pus or purulent matter from the substance of the lungs attended with hectic fever. Here it is evident the existence of an ulcer is insinuated. By Bayle it is said, that every pulmonary affection which when left at rest produces disorganization of the lungs, followed by ulceration, and death, ought to be considered as phthisis. I shall not attempt a formal criticism upon either of these definitions, but cannot forbear taking some exception to the latter, in as much as it excludes all those diseases when there is no actual disorganization, and includes all those when there is any organic derangement. I consider it extremely difficult if not

totally impossible to define the disease, and any one who shall be adventurous enough to attempt it will find himself much perplexed and embarrassed. Some writers, especially the older, had their divisions of this disease absurdly numerous. Sauvage had eighteen. To obtain perspicuity, and for purposes of a practical nature, the disease here will be considered under a much reduced number. I shall first notice tubercular consumption, or that form of the complaint produced by tubercles. But before the symptoms are detailed, a few observations will be made on the nature and appearance of tubercles, their seat, and origin. Tubercles are certain small tumors or masses of indurated matter found in

the substance of the lungs. Dissec-
tions of those who have died of con-
sumption have discovered them of all
sizes, from that of a small particle
of sand, to that of a bean, and of-
ten arranged in clusters. When cut into,
they exhibit a smooth, and cartilagi-
nous appearance. In the smallest of
them there is no cavity or opening, but
in the largest, or those in an advanced
state of disease, are two or more cavi-
ties containing a fluid of a purulent
appearance. This fluid being removed,
small apertures are visible, through which
by pressure more of this purulent mat-
ter can be forced. These largest are
found to be more capsules which con-
tain the purulent matter, and com-
municate with the minute ramifica-
tions of the bronchia pouring their

matter into them. (Respecting the nature and origin of tubercles, no certain information has been obtained. Cullen supposes them to be indurated glands produced by acrimony. Some think them connected with a sthenous diathesis - and others that they are mere depositions of matter from the capillary arteries; which are of various kinds and consistence. Harder formed tubercles sometimes remain for a long time indolent, but at length become inflamed and are thereby changed into abscesses or vomicae, which breaking give rise to a purulent expectoration, and thus lay the foundation of Phthisis. Not infrequently, only one tubercle bursts or is ruptured at a time; then it heals, producing a remission of the symptoms, and the patient cherishes

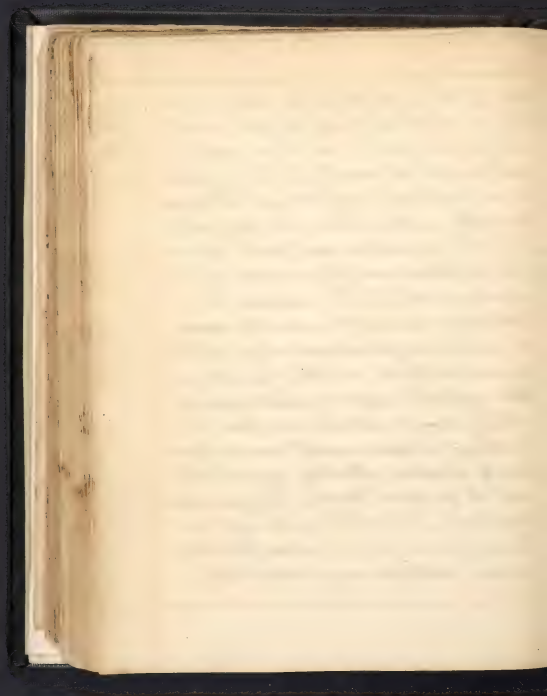


a hope of recovery. But upon the next exposure to the exciting causes two or more tubercles go through the same process which has been described, the distressing symptoms are renewed, the lungs at last become one entire mass of disease, hectic supervenes, and the patient rapidly sinks. - The exciting causes of consumption which have been already alluded to are numerous. The following are the most general. Haemoptysis, ill cured pneumonic inflammation, catarrh, asthma, repeated eruptions, frequent and excessive debaucheries, playing much on wind instruments, unfavourable states of the weather, especially its vicissitudes from heat to cold, and from dryness to humidity, suppressed haemorrhoidal, catamenial, and other accustomed evacuations, inordinate



play of the passions of the mind, occupations in which the body is kept much inclined forwards, or in those employments in which small particles of matter are constantly inhaled into the lungs. Hence straw cutters, those who dry-grind the points of needles, and pins, supervisors of cotton and flour mills are peculiarly liable to the complaint. —

Tubercular consumption usually comes on with a slight short cough which becomes habitual, is little remarked by those affected, and sometimes even absolutely denied. at the same time the breathing becomes readily hurried by any bodily exertion, the body grows lean, and the patient becomes languid and indolent. This state of things continues for a year, or even for two years, without any complaint



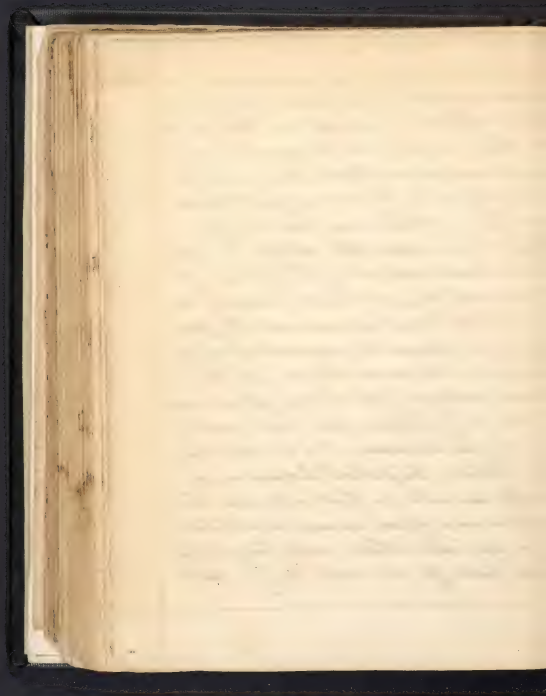
being made, excepting only, that he is more easily affected by cold than formerly, which frequently aggravates the cough, and produces some catarrh. This however is soon relieved, is supposed to have arisen from cold alone, excites no alarm either in the patient, or his friends, nor leads them to take any precautionary measures. Upon one of these occasions of catching cold, the cough becomes more considerable, is particularly troublesome at night when the patient retires to rest, and continues longer than is usual in the case of a simple catarrh. This now excites attention, particularly if it occurs during the summer season; the catarrhal symptoms appearing at this time show that the disease is more fixed. The cough coming on in the man-



not described, is often for a considerable time unattended with any expectoration: but after repeated taking cold, it becomes more constant, is at the same time attended with some expectoration, which is most considerable in the mornings. The matter of this expectoration becomes by degrees more copious, viscid, and opaque; attains of a yellow or greenish colour, and purulent appearance. The whole of the discharge however is not entirely changed in this manner, but while one part of it retains the form of mucus, another suffers the changes described. When the cough increases, and continues frequent through the night, and the matter expectorated undergoes these changes; the breathing becomes more oppressive, and the emaciation increases rapidly. - at the first



commencement of the disease the pulse is often natural, or perhaps is a little quicker than usual: but the symptoms which have been enumerated seldom subsist long before it becomes frequent, hard, and full. at the same time the face flushes, particularly after eating; the palms of the hands and soles of the feet are affected with burning heat; evening exacerbations ^{be} come obvious, and the fever by degrees assumes the exquisite form of hectic. The disease seldom runs its course without pain being felt in some part of the thorax, and most usually under the sternum. In the last stage of Phthisis, the patient becomes exceedingly emaciated, so that he presents the appearance of an animated skeleton: his eyes look hollow, and languid, his hair falls off, his nails are of a livid



colour, and much incurvated. To the end of the disease the mind is confident and full of hope. - shortly before death the extremities become cold, and in some instances a delirium precedes that continues until life is extinguished. I have now detailed the symptoms of tubercular consumption. - It is easily distinguished from the other forms of Phthisis by a particular conformation of body, obvious by a long neck, high cheek bones, prominent shoulders, a long narrow chest, by fair hair, clear skin, delicate rosy complexion, large veins, tumid upper lip, weak voice, blue eyes, great sensibility, remarkable vivacity of mind, and by all those signs indicating a scrophulous diathesis. - The treatment in this disease it is very obvious must vary exceedingly



in the different stages of it, and it should be carefully modified accordingly. The primary object, is to arrest inflammation of the Tubercles, and for this purpose blood-letting should be resorted to. This remedy was introduced into practice in the early stages of Phthisis by the celebrated Dover, who carried it to an unwarrantable extent, bleeding his patients in some cases upwards of fifty times. Thus by abusing the remedy it was brought into disrepute, and a directly opposite, and equally pernicious system was substituted. Incidit in scilham qui vult vitare Charibdim. -- To one of our own countrymen the credit is indisputably due, of reviving the lancet in this disease, and of wielding it with discretion, and judgment. In this as in



all other cases special regard must be
had to the pulse, and other circumstances
which lead to a knowledge of the state
of the system. The importance of sub-
duing inflammation on the one hand,
and the extreme debility of the patient
on the other, and the direct tendency
of this remedy to increase his debility
must be constantly borne in mind.

As auxiliary means, Topical evacua-
tions by cups and leeches, particular-
ly dry cupping should be employed.
Dr. Chapman says that when there is
not much force in the circulation, or
other signs of active inflammation, this
mode of detracting blood is preferable
even to the lancet itself. Its modus
operandi is very intelligible, it in-
verts the circulation from the lungs;
thereby relieving the tabordes of in-



inflammation more effectually, and of course does not so much exhaust the patient. This is the favourite practice of this country, and in attestation of its efficacy, the testimony of the most enlightened physicians could be adduced. The advantage of establishing some permanent irritation in this complaint has long been known and appreciated. For this purpose Blisters, setons, and issues have been employed. To avail, or in other words to be really useful they should be long continued; for a chronic remedy is necessary to the cure of a chronic disease. Of late it has been much in vogue to substitute the tartar emetic plaster, but it is believed to be recommended by little save its novelty. It is not more advantageous than a perpetual blister, and is certainly more



painful. In the early stages of consumption emetics have been highly extolled, and when judiciously administered relief has been certainly afforded. To this point the concurrent evidence of the ablest practitioners of this country could be had. They promote absorption, equalise the circulation, and the excitability, and added to this operate in a manner not to be readily explained. - The articles mostly employed are the antimoniated tartrate of potash, sulphate of copper, sulphate of zinc, and ipecacuanha. - Much difference of opinion has existed as to the comparative powers of them, some preferring one, and some another. The ipecacuanha is however at this time, in this country, the most fashionable medicine. Which ever be employed, in order to prove serviceable, must be exhibited daily for two or three weeks.



This frequent repetition imitates the effects of a sea voyage, which has so often been said to be beneficial in pulmonary consumption. By many practitioners, the saline purges are employed in the first, or inflammatory stage of the complaint in order to reduce the force of the circulation. but carried to any extent they are certainly production of harm, and in every variety of the complaint to be content to keep the bowels in a soluble state will be sufficient. To fulfil these indications, the antimonial articles in minute doses in combination with nitre will answer very well and I am told is much employed in the practice of this city. - In every stage and form of pulmonary consumption mercury was at one time prescribed. It obtained celebrity in this direction from its having cured in the hands of the celebrated Radcliffe, King William;



and about the same era was the favourite remedy in pectoral complaints. Dr. Ballard in his annotations on Ballou observes: "If we ever saw an instance, wherein real consumption was cured, it was by this remedy. Five years ago we employed it successfully in the case of a gentleman who had very threatening symptoms of the complaint. But I am persuaded this case was not one of genuine tubercular consumption. It is pernicious in every stage of the complaint: and I believe much of the confidence formerly reposed in it is now flown. Why it should be deleterious in tubercular consumption, considering its utility in scrophula, is not intelligible. Relying on analogy, exactly the reverse would be anticipated. The next remedy which claims attention is the digitalis. But for the progress of medical



opinion relative to the powers of this in
pulmonary consumptions. They learn
to refer to Chapman's Therapeutics. It
will only be observed here, that in the on-
ly case in which it can be relied on, is in
the incipient stage, attended with slight
haemoptysis, a small, quick irritable pulse,
impeded respiration, and a short dry, cough.
I have now enumerated the most approved
remedies in the early or what is thought
the inflammatory stage of Phthisis. But it
is a melancholy truth that they are often
inadequate to the arrest of the disease;
abscess forms, and hectic fever with its
frightful train follows. In this sad con-
dition of things, experience authorizes the
conclusion, that we can do but little more
than alleviate the patient's sufferings. This
indeed constitutes the distinctive character
of tubercular consumption; which grad-



ually undermines the frail fabric of mortality, and ultimately cuts short the slender thread which supports life. But though beyond rescue from death, the patient should not be abandoned. The resources of medicine afford abundant means of smoothing the avenue to the grave, and humanity forbids them to be withheld. The leading indication here, is to abate hectic fever, which would soon destroy if permitted to continue unremitted. It uniformly wears the intermittent type of the ordinary fever of this description, and demands the same remedies viz the purgatives, bark, and other vegetable tonics, to which may be added arsenic, certain preparations of steel, lead, &c. The success of some practitioners with the nitric acid in healing oropharyngeal ulcers, led them to employ it in in this stage of consump-



tion. Though of some use I believe it has not acquired any solid reputation. Impelled by the desire of discovering some remedy for this disease Dr. Roberts ~~was~~ not long since instituted a series of experiments with almost every article of the Materia Medica. The result was that vinegar was found to be the most efficacious remedy. Of late the practice has been revived of endeavouring the healing of ulcers of the lungs by inhaling the vapour of certain resins, and balsamic substances. The articles recommended are the turbinthinate preparations, and the balsam of Tolu. The vapour of sulphuric ether has been recommended, either alone, or impregnated with the leaves of hemlock. This is a valuable remedy, as it relieves the cough, dyspnoea, and oppression. - On principles nearly allied, the inhalation of atmospheric air various.



ly diluted and combined with certain gases has been proposed. To experiment extensively with the remedy Dr. Boddard established what he termed the pneumatic institution. It was proposed by him to inhale the carbonic acid gas, under an impression that it would correct the foul ulcers, and dispose them to take on the healing process. But however plausible in theory, when tested by actual practice, the remedy proved unavailing. Various other projects have been proposed for the cure of consumption, such as confining patients day and night with cows, in order to inhale their vapour, inhamating them as it were, &c. The efficacy of the first of these remedies is believed to be extremely problematical, and the latter absolutely deleterious. - as the disease advances affections arise of so urgent a



nature as to demand particular attention.
Of these one of the most troublesome are
night sweats, which arise from debility of
the exhalents and can be most effectually
checked by applications made to the part
affected. By dressing in warm flannel
and rubbing the surface with stimulating
applications, such as salt, or brandy, much
advantage is derived. The most effectual
of the internal remedies, are the mineral
acids, especially the sulphuric, given alone,
or in combination with some of the vegetable
bitters. Sugar of lead, arsenic, and allum-
ina, also have been recommended. Lime water
taken freely is often very beneficial. Another
of these distressing affections is diarrhoea.
This may be combated precisely by the
same remedies which are given in other
forms of the complaint. Very minute
doses of mercury here has been known



To check it when every thing else had failed. at this stage of the disease the cough which throughout is uniformly troublesome, becomes exceedingly aggravated, and solicits relief. Now most of the cough mixtures, and especially the preparation of gum ammonia and nitric are useful. The balsamic articles are also here useful. an article vended under the title of the balsam of honey is an admirable remedy in the last stages of Phthisis. It is composed principally of the balsam of tolu so mingled with other articles as to render it much more agreeable than the simple undisguised medicine. But of all remedies, opium though it never cures affords the greatest amount of benefit. It relieves the cough, moderates diarrhoea, alleviates pain, and upholds for a time the sinking strength. When all other



means have been ultimately abandoned,
and hope itself, which lingers in this dis-
ease with surprising obstinacy is ready
to take its flight, opium, by its pow-
ers disarms even death of its horrors, and
proves most emphatically, the magnum
dei donum. - I have hitherto said no-
thing of the preventive measures in this dis-
ease. A few remarks therefore relative to
the proper plan to be pursued here seem
to be required. By the common consent of
practitioners the first step in this prophyl-
actic course, is to remove the patient
from the humid, bleak, and changeable at-
mosphere of northern, and middle latitudes,
to healthy situations nearer the sun. -
as relates to this country the interior of
Georgia or New Orleans are perhaps the
most eligible situations. as a part of
the above plan, exercise is highly appu-



ciated, particularly on horseback. But it must be regulated by discrimination and judgment. - Employed when much inflammatory diathesis prevails, it will not fail to prove serviceable. The patient should also, ^{be} prevented from venturing out in arid conditions of the atmosphere. Little advantage however will be gained unless strict attention is paid to regimen. That food should be selected which is light, and easy of digestion, with the least stimulating properties. - Milk mixed with some one of the farinaceous articles will constitute the best diet. To conclude what I have to say of the prophylactic measures, it will only be added that all the exciting causes should be studiously avoided, particularly cold; which may be guarded against by wearing flannel next the skin.



at all seasons. When this essay was
commenced it was intended to treat the
other forms of consumption; but as
my time is limited, and as most of the
remedies which have been enumerated
are also applicable to these last, I hope
I shall be excused for having omitted
to do so. -

at all times. When the
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